

TESTIMONY OF JESSICA SALAFIA BEFORE THE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE
Department of Rehabilitative Services Budget (DORS)
Legislative Office Building, February 27, 2015

Good evening to the Appropriations Committee. My name is Jessica Salafia. Thank you for the chance to voice my concerns tonight. I live in Windsor, Connecticut. I'm proud to work as an advocate at Independence Unlimited, Inc., the non-profit Independent Living Center of the Greater Hartford Area. I do not support cutting the centers from the State budget.

One of my jobs is to help people with disabilities with their pre-employment and employment skills training. I answer questions and concerns about job discrimination and unemployment benefits. There are often times when these same people require additional services at the same time, or months or years later: finding housing resources due to impending evictions; requesting information about their disability or a new condition; helping make calls for emergency shelter to leave an abusive situation; help applying for medical benefits; and figuring out transportation options.

As an advocate for Independence Unlimited I get to see on a daily basis how much occurs when individuals are given the tools to try new things, and the encouragement to keep trying. When some individuals haven't learned independent living skills for some reason or other, such as a parent not being certain how to teach them or because they once believed their children couldn't learn, we are the opportunity to learn to perform things like: laundry, budgets, shopping lists, phone calls, scripting difficult conversations, making doctor's appointments, planning a daily routine, keeping a journal, and basic computer skills.

We use technical terms like Information and Referral; Peer Counseling; Independent Living Skills Training; Advocacy; and Options Counseling but these terms don't convey the level of meaning and emotional effect that these services have for the people we help. I get to see the differences we make for people and the meaningful differences that actually change lives. I feel privileged to be part of that. We don't just get results for people. If that's all we cared about then people wouldn't return when they have new needs and concerns, sometimes repeatedly and sometimes years later. They come back to us repeatedly because they know they can trust us. They make referrals to friends, relatives and even to strangers they chatted with on a bus because they know we care.

Living with disability, I know that there's a very real likelihood that I'm going to need the invaluable help from one of the centers one day. I have Fibromyalgia which is a chronic pain disorder. It causes widespread nerve pain that makes it difficult to perform daily tasks such as meal preparation, climbing stairs, or on truly bad days typing, driving, and shifting positions on a chair or couch. I don't tell many people this, but I also suffer from Depressive Disorder, Anxiety Disorder, and Agoraphobia. As a woman with disabilities, I connect with consumers in

a way that they know is genuine. I'm forthright and honest to the point of disclosing my own disabilities.

I'm also in honored position of being mother to a child that has disabilities. My middle child, who is 12 years old, has Autism. I draw inspiration from her but I truly hope that when she's older, should she need services of an Independent Living Center, she has one with full services.

I am against the proposed budget cuts to the centers for more than just my livelihood. I truly believe that the centers are a valuable resource for our aging population and individuals that have disabilities. The services we provide that may seem so simple to others are invaluable to our consumers, and most of the time we're their only resource or their last stop at the end of the road.

I request that you restore funding to our centers so that we may continue to serve our Connecticut residents with the high quality of services they have come to expect, and that they deserve. The loss that these cuts would mean would dramatically affect our ability to continue to provide services to the population that is most in need. Let us continue to be a voice for them.